

March 10, 2006- WEST VIRGINIA HAS A TRADITION OF STRONG WOMEN

West Virginia Has A Tradition Of Strong Women

This March our nation observes Women's History Month, which, since 1987, has been a time to remember and acknowledge the contributions of women to the history and culture of the United States.

This year's theme, "Women: Builders of Communities and Dreams," honors the spirit of possibility and hope set in motion by generations of women in their creation of communities and their encouragement of dreams. Most certainly, many southern West Virginia women have nurtured the dreams of those who followed in their footsteps, and through their tireless dedication and often unacknowledged hard work, have laid the foundations for the communities we enjoy today.

To fully appreciate the breadth and depth of the contributions of so many strong women, we need only to imagine what life in the Mountain State would be like without them.

Where would our miners be, for example, without the hard work of Mother Jones, who might have looked like a white-haired grandmother, but displayed the strength of men twice her size and half her age in her relentless battle for better wages and living conditions of our brave workers?

And where would our mothers be without Ann Marie Jarvis, the daughter of a minister whose work with women's organizations inspired the creation of Mother's Day as a national holiday?

Other women, too, have made lasting contributions that have changed the landscape of our land and our intellect:

Virginia "Jenny" Wilson of Logan County, one of the first women to pick up a banjo, played folk music and told stories as well or better than anyone in her day and played a vital role in popularizing a tradition that continues to echo through the West Virginia hills.

Ann Royall of Monroe County, regarded by many as the first female journalist, started a new wave of investigative journalism when she moved to Washington and secured an old Ramage printing press and a font of battered type. Her small weekly called "The Washington Paul Pry," a no-holds-barred periodical, put fear into many a politician.

Minnie Buckingham Harper of Keystone, the first African American woman to become a member of a legislative body in the United States, broke ground for countless women in 1928 when she was appointed to fill the term of her late husband.

Helen Dobson of Raleigh County, well-known throughout West Virginia for her beautiful voice, performed at the inauguration of two of West Virginia's governors and served as public school teacher for many years. Her spirit is still strong in southern West Virginia.

Pearl S. Buck, born in Hillsborough., winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1938 for the Good Earth, was one of the first true humanitarians and left us the priceless gift of nearly eighty works, including novels, plays, short story collections, poems, children's books, and biographies.

Buck joins a bevy of talented women who left us the legacy of literature. Others include: Louise McNeill, poet laureate from Pocahontas County and Margaret Prescott Montague of Greenbrier County, the winner of the nation's first O. Henry Award for the short story.

This, of course, is just a small sampling of so many strong West Virginia women who have made a difference. Add to this list the countless women who stood strong and supported their families in times of war, hardship, and loss and who, through their compassion and charity, were role models by which we all can live. Also add to this list the many women who continue today to work for a better West Virginia.

Women's History Month may only come once a year, but every day is a better day thanks to the efforts of unwavering West Virginia women.